



Youth Shelter Utilization

The Street Youth Task Force completed a study of youth shelter utilization in King County, WA. in March of 2002. These are the key findings.

The Goals of Youth Shelter

- ◆ Keeping youth safe for the night
- ◆ Preventing runaways from being engaged in street activity
- ◆ Helping homeless youth regain a sense of safety and security
- ◆ Developing trust with youth to engage them in transitional services

Key Findings

- ◆ Some shelters have high vacancy rates, but on the whole shelter underutilization is not as severe as we thought
- ◆ Utilization of youth shelters in King County is better than the national average
- ◆ A lot of youth who want shelter can't get it
- ◆ Some homeless youth don't like to use shelters
- ◆ Youth shelters cannot and should not operate at 100% of capacity

Solutions

- ◆ Exempt shelters from runaway reporting time limits
- ◆ Make programs as attractive to youth as possible, then market them
- ◆ Develop better coordination between low-barrier programs (outreach, overnight, drop-in) and more intensive services
- ◆ Develop clarity about the type of youth each program is designed to serve and develop triage system to match youth with the right program

Why Some Youth Don't Want to Use Shelter

- ◆ They think it is dangerous
- ◆ It is not comfortable
- ◆ They have had or heard about bad experiences including:
 - Police taking youth out in handcuffs for a run report
 - Belongings getting stolen
 - Assaults
 - Lice or infectious disease
- ◆ They care about or are dependent on a partner, pet, activity or substance that they would have to give up to use a shelter

The Street Youth Task Force is working on these solutions.
If you would like to get involved contact Mary Shaw, Seattle Human Services Department
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